C. G. 793 hereditary rights. The priest, called khevis beri "elder of the valley," khutsi "priest" or dek'anozi "dean," pronounced the ceremonial C. G. [782] prayers and sacrificed the sheep and cows offered as victims. The kadagi or dzhvaris C. G. [791] meene "interpreter," "tongue of the dzhvari," a kind of shaman, pronounced the will of the khat'i. The medroshe "standard bearer" or khat'is pekhi "foot of the khat'i" carried the sacred banner (drosha) on festive days. A special functionary attended to the brewing of the sacred beer, a custom borrowed from the C. G. [796] Ossetes. The beer was drunk at the annual festivals which were attended by all the "serfs" of the khat'i.

In Svanetia the functions of the Khevsur khevis beri were performed by priests not regularly ordained and without any theological training; they were called bap (from Greek C. G. [771] pappas). The numerous ancient churches were neglected and were only used for storing the vessels, vestments and books relating to the divine service; these were jealously C. G. 796 guarded from alienation. Many originally Christian feasts and Saint's days were celebrated with prayers, drinking of home-made brandy and eating of sacrificed animals and C. G. [769] fancy bread of different traditional shapes. Similar rites were observed on the commemoration days of the dead which were performed at fixed intervals.

c.o. 776 naive and primitive way of thinking. These are popular creations, mainly tutelary deities and spirits of various realms of nature, such as Fälwära, the guardian of domestic animals; Buduri-Usad, the god of the fields; Khualar-Dar, the god of the harvest: Ävsati, the protector of the deer, the ibex and other game; Donbettyr (Donbettär), the guardian spirit of the waters, the fish and fishermen; Safa, the tutelary spirit of the chain which hangs about the hearth and is so holy an object in an Osset's house, that its removal can bring about the death of the inhabitants of the house and its c.o. theft can lead to a blood feud; Runibari, a god [753] of health (who brings disease and wards it off); c.o. the Geniata or Fazbadata, the guardian spirits [769] of families and the spirits (ghosts) of deceased souls, who are supposed to watch over, and further the well-being of, their families on earth. It is characteristic of the mentality of the Ossets that one of their guardian spirits, Saureg-Gsua by name, protects even thieves and robbers.

However, functions of guardianship are also attributed to some of the Christian saints who have become prominent figures in the religion of the Ossets. Vastyrdzhi (Digor Vasgergi), Saint George, protects travelers, controls military roads and mountain paths, and in contrast to the spirit Saurge-Gsua mentioned above, persecutes thieves and robbers and punishes perjurers and murderers. Vatsilla,

771 their deities, their ways of worship and their
177 festivals, shows clearly that it is a rather sober and primitive pagan religion with a thin surface of a few superficially adopted features of Christianity and Islam. It is most significant, that it is almost entirely devoid of the conception and the worship of God as a Supreme Being, and that only guardian spirits are invoked to grant protection, happiness and prosperity. It is moreover noteworthy that in this religion of tribes of Iranian origin, who have preserved a richly developed Iranian language partly archaic in character, there are to be found scarcely any distinct traits of an older form of Iranian religion. On the other hand, it can be stated that some of the characteristic conceptions of the Ossetic religion are similar to those of the religions of neighboring Caucasian tribes.

769 An essential part of any religious belief
775 is represented by the conception of death and the fate of the soul in the life to come. We have already mentioned that the soul of the deceased continues its existence as the guardian spirit of its former family. He takes care of the well-being of the family, and according to an old custom, the Ossets twice a year arrange a feast in the woods in honor of the spirit, which is accompanied by the offering of food and drink. They believe that at the time when a
761 person is sick, a tribunal of six men is formed in Heaven to decide whether this person should die. If the decision is in the affirmative, death

595 (1) Custom permits *all* North Caucasians and their neighbours, whether Christian or Mohammedan, to marry more than one wife. The Tartars near the city of Derbend in the eighteenth century are the only exception, but even in this single case, it is not certain whether they were monogamists *de jure* or only *de facto*.

[177] (2) Everywhere polygyny is *pre-Islamic*, even if previous to their conversion to Islamism the particular tribe happened to be Christian. We might rightly, therefore, inquire into the possible origin of polygyny in the Caucasus. Polygyny, if borrowed at all, was not borrowed as an *isolated* institution. On the contrary, it seems to be a North Caucasian possession, first of all, as old as the practice [594] of levirate (*infra*, pp. 71—75). Furthermore, it seems to be a North Caucasian [614] cultural possession as old as the economic, social, and religious structure of the North Caucasian family itself. Here we understand " family " in its broad sense, including the joint-family and sib. We cannot now describe this family structure in detail. Briefly, by " the economic, social, and religious structure of the family " we understand that the family in North Caucasia has been and in many places still is the *raison d'être* of the individual.[30a] Whatever the individual does or whatever is done to him or for him has only one aim, the perpetuation and [581] prosperity of the family. Now, in the mind of the North Caucasian, polygyny is an immense asset and at times absolutely indispensable for the economic, social, and religious life of the all-important and solely-important family.

593 *Economically* considered, the wife is extremely important. In the North 562 Caucasus it is the wife who does most of the work (*infra*, pp. 156—159). In fact, sometimes a rich Avar will marry a son to a poor girl or to a widow of a lower class, with whom he is forbidden all communication, in order to have an additional worker in the house.[31] Moreover, a wife is not only a *worker*; she 842 is the " *worker-producing* " organ of the family. Even though boys are preferred (*infra*, pp. 159 ff), girls prove to be good and valuable workers and bring in, at times, a large brideprice (*infra*, pp. 82—91). Now, the more wives there are in the household, the more " worker-producing " organs there are, and by that very fact, at least in the mind of the natives, the family becomes so much the more economically healthy and secure.

The *religious* structure of the family may have contributed just as much to [769] the rise of polygyny as did the economic form of life. The most sacred duty of the individual and of the individual family is, or at least has been, to perpetuate itself, and thus to perpetuate the cult of the ancestors. It is a fact throughout North Caucasus that only a *son* can perpetuate the family and prevent the greatest calamity imagineable, its extinction. But a wife is precisely the " *boy-producing* " organ. If this organ is lacking or fails to function the family is doomed. Today one of the main motives for taking a second wife is sterility.[32] Or again, a second wife will be acquired if the first gives birth only to girls.

[30a] According to ancient customary laws.

[31] L'vov, *op. cit.*, p. 18.

[32] Cf. K. Mačavariani, " Někotoryja čerty iz žizni Abchazcev. Položenie ženščiny v Abchazii," SMOMPK, IV (1884), No. 2, p. 42. E. G. Pčelina, " Rodil'nye obyčai u osetin," SE, 1937, No. 4, p. 88.

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turn, must have stimulated the entire family to watch most carefully over the conduct of their daughters; and this watchfulness, again, must have been responsible for *adats* threatening the girl as well as any lover with the most severe sanctions not only for an actual perforation of the hymen but also, as the *adats* frequently express it, for any "suspicious approach."[109]

There have been other explanations offered for the virginity test. Westermarck, for instance, suggested masculine jealousy.[110] But this explanation is not applicable to the peoples of North Caucasia, for, as we have already mentioned, the sexual factor has very little significance in the selection of mates compared to the all-important economic, social, and religious factors. Such a jealousy, where mutual attraction matters so little, is unthinkable.[111]

(6) The custom of the bride thrice walking round the fireplace is an ancient wedding ceremony frequently found among pastoral tribes. As is well known, it was also the custom of the ancient Indo-Europeans. That one of the main wedding ceremonies in the Caucasus should take place at the fireplace is quite in keeping with the deep religious significance of the hearth. Among a large number of Caucasian mountain tribes, especially in North Ossetia, Ingushetia, and Daghestan, we find the custom of never allowing the fire in the hearth to die out, this practice being a form of cult for the dead.[112] The fire and especially the chain above it constitute a connection between the living and the departed. It forms a sacred asylum for any murderer, because as soon as he touches the chain the ancestors of the victim approve of the murderer's adoption into the family. The chain is the symbol of the family: to tear it down is regarded as one of the most abominable crimes imagineable, an insult to the living and dead members of the sib, which must be punished with death. The chain is a symbol of the family and therefore it must be buried with the last member of an extinct sib. To swear by the hearth-chain is an infallible sign that the person is saying the truth, for to do so falsely is unthinkable.[113] Such an oath would be a curse upon the entire sib and their ancestors. In other words, the ancient solidarity of the sib is intimately connected with the ancient religion of the North Caucasians, and the sanctuary of this religion is the hearth. Now, marriage is an act by which a stranger is taken into the family, and one of the most natural means, most in harmony with the ancient Caucasian form of life, is the hearth and hearth-chain. It is indeed striking that in Daghestan the cult of the fireplace still exists today but not the wedding ceremony. This fact confirms rather than disproves our explanation, for in Daghestan the wife was not a stranger: she had to be chosen from within the sib! (Cf. *supra*, pp. 51 f.)

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[109] *Infra*, Chapter XII, p. 176.

[110] The History of Marriage, I, p. 163.

[111] The jealousy would have to be so great that the disappointed husband would insist that the bride's nose be cut off or that she be otherwise mutilated and even killed, for such are the ancient adats!

[112] Günther, "Zusammenstöße zwischen Gesetz und Gewohnheitsrecht im nördlichen Kaukasus," *Zeitschrift f. vergl. Rechtsw.*, XLVI (1931), p. 324.

[113] *ibid.*

585 [716] (7) In a number of instances we have noticed that the dagger or sword was used in connection with the marriage ceremony. The best-man took the bride around the hearth and each time he struck the chain with his dagger. The bride had to enter her new home under an arch of swords or with a dagger or club held above her head. This wedding custom, too, has a religious basis. The household gods of the bride's family have become exceedingly jealous of the bride, because by marrying she has united herself to another family and will now worship other ancestors, abandoning her own. These jealous godlets realize that the best time to enter her new home and to cause countless harm is simultaneously with the bride. Fortunately, these household gods are afraid of daggers.[114] [846] Among the Georgian mountaineers, a mother after having given birth to a child will keep a sword under the pillow as a protection against aerial spirits.[115] Spirits are afraid of the sword for several reasons—at least such is our conjecture. The God of Iron, of the Sword, and of the Hearth-Chain is one and the same god, called Safa. This sword ceremony may perhaps insure [823] Safa's protection against jealous godlets. It may also insure the protection of [769] the departed because *iron* is a means of contacting ancestors. In Ossetia on the [787] "feast of the dedication of clothing" clothes are consecrated and sent to the netherworld by means of an iron knife.[116] The Ingushi get in contact with their departed by means of iron tongs.[117]

(8) The other marriage ceremonies are likewise mainly pastoral in character: horse-racing, submission to the husband, wishes for a rich progeny but always with a disproportion of "nine boys to every blue-eyed girl." Finally, the long elaborate and expensive wedding itself is typical of pastoral peoples.

[606] There are, however, a few traces of a so-called mother-right culture. The rôle played by the mother-in-law in the ceremonies, as we have stressed (*supra*, p. 125), is indeed not inconsistent with the position of the mother of the household in a patriarchal family, but, we must admit that their astounding importance gives them a suspiciously matriarchal colouring: in the ceremonies described, it is the Lesghian mother who welcomes the bride into the house as if she were the head of the family. It is the mother who holds her by the hand as she crosses the threshold. It is the mother's brother who led the bride's horse in the Ingiloi procession from her home to that of her groom. It is the mother who puts the honey into the mouth of the bride as a sign that the bride has a sweet life ahead of her under such an amiable mistress as her mother-in-law. And we should not forget that in the Lesghian engagement it was the mother who presented the engagement gifts which concluded the betrothal contract.[118]

595 585 114 We cannot conclude this chapter without briefly refuting some of Kovalevskij's assumptions. Like so many anthropologists of his day, he was inclined to find traces of an epoch older than that of patriarchy, and older than that of

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[114] For the custom among the Ossetes see Kovalevskij, *Coutume contemp.*, pp. 170 f.

[115] Cf. Reineggs, *op. cit.*, II, p. 112 f.

[116] Kokiev, *Slepovye soeružeinija*, (Vladikavkaz, 1928), p. 38.

[117] Baddeley, *op. cit.*, II, p. 120.

[118] *Supra*, p. 103.

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essential parallels—characteristic of the Turco-Mongolian family are: the almost complete absence of mother-right and totemistic practices, the emphasis placed on the joint-family and the male members, special rights for the first-born son, importance of the male head of the family and the *patria potestas*, the disadvantageous position of the female sex, blood-feuds, exogamy, the *kalym*, which is usually paid in live-stock, the dread of incest, the severe penalties for sexual offenses, fireplace ceremony at weddings, the high esteem for the bride's virginity, the unusual craving for male children, the importance of the bridal procession, etc.

There is also a religious connection between the North Caucasians, the Indo-Europeans, and the Turco-Mongols, a connection that confirms our claim of the existence of a social connection between the three groups. It is not only the *similarity* of the religions of the three groups that we must keep in mind but also the intimate connection, the *organic* connection, between the nomadic social and religious forms. The solidarity which exists among the members of a sib, the great longing for male children, blood-feuds, the levirate, the *patria potestas*, the wedding custom of walking around the fireplace, and many other practices are fundamentally connected with ancestor worship and cult for the dead. Ancestor worship is one of the essential features of the religion of the Indo-Europeans, the Turco-Mongols, and the North Caucasians. Moreover, among all three groups ancestor worship is linked up with the worship of the fireplace. Another very essential part of the pastoral nomadic religion was the custom of sacrificing horses. W. Koppers has shown the great similarity between the horse-sacrifices of the Indo-European and Altai peoples;[48] R. Bleichsteiner proved beyond question the existence of the practice throughout the highlands of Caucasia.[49] Horse-sacrifices among the Indo-Europeans and the North Caucasians are certainly of Inner Asiatic origin.

Thus we see that even though the North Caucasians are not pastoral nomadic in the economic sense—the economy of the steppes is impossible in the mountains, especially in the unfertile valleys of the Caucasus—they are pastoral nomadic in their social organization. *A connection between the North Caucasian society and that of Inner Asia is beyond question.*

3. Vestiges of More Ancient Cultures In the Marriage and Family Customary Laws of the North Caucasians

As is only natural, the deeper we delve into the history of the marriage and family *adats* the more obscure the history becomes.

First of all there are the so-called mother-right vestiges which we must consider. It is interesting to note that the intensity of these vestiges among the three different groups of Caucasians (Northwestern, Northeastern, and Southern)

[48] W. Koppers, *op. cit.*, pp. 12 f, 18—22. See also W. Koppers, "Pferdeopfer und Pferdekult der Indogermanen," *Wiener Beiträge zur Kulturgeschichte und Linguistik*, IV (1936), pp. 280—411.

[49] "Rossweihe und Pferderennen im Totenkult der kaukasischen Völker," *Wiener Beiträge zur Kulturgeschichte und Linguistik*, IV (1936), pp. 412—495.